

**REMARKS**

Reconsideration and allowance of this application are respectfully requested.

Applicants acknowledge with appreciation the indication that claim 6 contains allowable subject matter.

Claims 1-5 and 7-9 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. Section 102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by Heumann *et al.* (U.S. Patent 5,661,811). Applicants respectfully submit that their claims are not anticipated by the disclosure of this document and, indeed, that their claims are patentable over the content of this document.

According to amended claim 1, the balance control device attenuates one of the first and second volume levels and maintains (or increases) the other of the first and second volume levels to be at the main volume level. If an external audio signal is supplied to the speaker (or speakers) to which the volume has not been attenuated and the non-attenuated volume level is attenuated, the main volume level is attenuated and the one of the first and second volume levels is maintained at the attenuated main volume level. This operation is shown in connection with an illustrative example embodiment in the graph of Figure 5.

Thus, when the external audio signal is input to the speaker at the non-attenuated level, it is possible to avoid increasing the attenuated level of the speaker to which the external audio signal is not input. As a result, the sound image may be prevented from moving to the speaker to which the external signal is not input, and difficulties associated with sound image movement can be reduced.

Huemann *et al.* does not disclose the operation described in claim 1 when an external audio signal is supplied to the speaker (or speakers) to which volume has not been attenuated and the non-attenuated volume level is attenuated, *i.e.*, attenuating the main volume level and maintaining the one of the first and second volume levels at the attenuated main volume level. Consequently, Huemann *et al.* cannot anticipate the subject matter of claim 1 or its dependent claims.

YABE et al.

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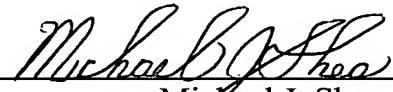
Therefore, all rejected claims are patentably distinguished over Huemann *et al.*

The amendments to claim 1 (and the conforming amendments to claims 2 and 7) are believed to place the application in condition for allowance. Consequently, entry of the amendments is believed to be appropriate and is respectfully requested.

Reconsideration and favorable action are solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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